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SUBJECT: KOSOVO'S NON-SERB MINORITIES LOOKING FOR MORE CLOUT

REF: PRISTINA 1219

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Kosovo's non-Serb minorities are trying to increase their role in the new Kosovo government and solidify their participation on Kosovo's delegation to status negotiations. Non-Serb minorities currently control the health ministry, fill a rotating seat in the Assembly Presidency, and were - albeit at the last minute - afforded a place on the Pristina negotiating team at the first round of status negotiations. They want to increase their influence with additional high-level government positions, including deputy interior minister and advisors to the Prime Minister and to the education minister. END SUMMARY.

NON-SERB MINORITIES WANT GREATER ROLE IN GOVERNMENT

¶2. (SBU) The recent establishment of the new Kosovo justice and interior ministries has created key new positions, and the confirmation of Agim Ceku as Prime Minister on March 10 has created the potential for a possible shakeup of the cabinet. (NOTE. Ceku said he will review all ministerial positions within 30 days of taking office. END NOTE.) Kosovo Assembly Presidency member and President of the Kosovo Democratic Turkish Party (KDTP) Mahir Yagcilar told PolOff and PolFSN on March 7 that members of the "Six Plus" Prizren-based Turkish/Bosniak coalition voted as a block for Agim Ceku to become the new Prime Minister on March 10, and hope to play a greater role in the new government. (NOTE. The "Six Plus" coalition, with six assembly seats, is part of the LDK/AAK governing coalition. The four non-Serb minority MPs who are not in "Six Plus" (Gorani, Ashkali, Roma and Bosniak representatives) abstained from that vote. END NOTE.)

¶3. (SBU) Yagcilar said that "Six Plus" is lobbying for Turkish "Six Plus" member Altay Suroy, public district attorney in Prizren, to become the new deputy minister of justice. He said that "Six Plus" would also like to see designated positions created for non-Serb minorities to serve

as advisors to the Prime Minister and the education minister.

(NOTE. Dejan Jankovic, a high ranking Kosovo Serb from the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) (who was injured in a shooting incident in September 2005) was approved by the assembly as the deputy interior minister on March 10. END NOTE.) Yagcilar also said that "Six Plus" supports Health Minister Sadik Idrizi, a Bosniak, to continue in office in PM Ceku's new government. (NOTE. The position of deputy returns minister is held by Egyptian community leader Ibush Bajrami, but he says that he has been completely sidelined by ethnic Serb minister Slavisa Petkovic. END NOTE.)

NON-SERB MINORITIES WANT ONGOING PARTICIPATION ON STATUS TEAM

14. (SBU) Members of the "Six Plus" coalition met with UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari on March 2 and reasserted their desire to participate constructively in the status process. Yagcilar said that he was encouraged that Idrizi was named to the Kosovo delegation to the February 20-21 talks in Vienna on decentralization. However, he was disappointed by the last minute manner in which Idrizi was selected by the team, without consulting the non-Serb minority leaders as to who would be the best candidate.

15. (SBU) Yagcilar said that "Six Plus" supports Idrizi to continue as its representative on the Kosovo negotiating team for the March 17 meeting in Vienna, and for all future meetings on decentralization. He said that they would like to have the opportunity to choose different representatives for subsequent meetings, depending on the topic. In addition to decentralization, non-Serb minorities are particularly interested in talks on property rights and cultural heritage. Bosniak Dzezair Murati, previous "Six Plus" representative

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on the assembly presidency and head of "Six Plus," told PolFSN that "it is now obvious" that Albanian leaders see the advantage of including non-Serb minorities on the team, both to inform substance and to improve the optics of minority inclusion.

16. (SBU) Yagcilar told PolFSN that he is satisfied with the progress of the Turk-majority Mamusha decentralization pilot project and said he supports the creation of additional new municipalities as part of the status process. For example, he supports Bosniak proposals for new municipalities in the ethnically-mixed Zupa valley near Prizren (15,000 inhabitants) and in Vitomirica near Peja/Pec (7,000 inhabitants).

DEVELOPING A JOINT PLATFORM FOR NON-SERB MINORITIES

17. (SBU) Yagcilar said that Veton Surroi's Consultative Council for Minority Communities (which met in late February) has the potential to become a useful entity, but needs to be more concrete (Reftel). He said that it should work to institutionalize minority participation in status talks in Vienna. Yagcilar is taking an active role in his new position as a member of the assembly presidency by working with all ten non-Serb minority MPs to develop a joint platform for status negotiations. He said that this work will continue at a planned meeting of the Council in Kukes, Albania on March 26, which the COM has confirmed he will attend. (NOTE. If successful, it will be the first time that Kosovo's notoriously fractious non-Serb minorities will be able to unite around a common platform. END NOTE).

18. (SBU) COMMENT. Kosovo's non-Serb minorities are trying to take advantage of the recent changes in Kosovo's government and strong ties with the new leadership to expand their role in both the government and on Pristina's status negotiating team. If they succeed in developing a joint negotiation platform supported by all of Kosovo's non-Serb minorities, it would be a significant step forward in

bringing together non-Serb minorities and, they believe, greatly strengthen their claim for a seat in the status talks. More substantive participation by non-Serb minorities will also serve as a positive example to Kosovo Serbs of the benefits of engagement and participation. END COMMENT.

19. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG